Lifestyle Changes for a Healthier Heart

Living Healthier, Living Longer

Maybe someone in your family has heart disease or has had a heart attack. Or maybe you have been told that you're at risk for heart disease. The good news is that there are things you can do to reduce your risks. Read on to learn about lifestyle changes you can make to keep your heart healthier. Then use what you learn to create step-by-step plans for making those changes.

What Puts You at Risk for Heart Disease?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Some of the things that increase your risk for heart disease can't be changed. These include your age, your sex, or a family history of heart disease. But there are other risks you can reduce. Which of the risks below could you take steps to reduce?

- Smoking damages the lining of your arteries (blood vessels). It also narrows the arteries, which raises your blood pressure and reduces blood flow to the heart.
- High cholesterol can lead to a buildup of fatty deposits called plaque in the arteries. The higher your cholesterol, the greater your risk for heart disease.
- High blood pressure occurs when blood presses too hard on the walls of the arteries. This damages the lining of the vessels.
- Excess weight makes your heart work harder. This raises your risk of a heart attack.
- Lack of physical activity can double your risk for heart disease. That's because the heart is a muscle and being active helps strengthen it.
- Stress increases your blood pressure and the speed at which your heart beats (heart rate). Both can damage the lining of the arteries

Source: American Heart Association: http://americanheart.org